

ZYGOTE

It's a mixed bag of diatribes this month as **Zygote** tackles Chinese internet porn, cash machines and ink cartridges. But first, can it ever be OK to use the word of Allah as a ringtone?

RING PULLS

You can tell a lot about someone from the ringtone on their mobile phone. Someone who hasn't change the default setting on their Nokia has abandoned all hope and is likely to commit suicide. Anyone who picks a vintage telephone bell effect is liable to pin you to the rug and bore you to death. And you should never make eye contact with someone carrying the Crazy Frog, Justin Timberlake or *The Archers* in their pocket, because they are homicidal maniacs.

But what are we to make of the increasing usage of verses from the Koran as ringtones? It has been reported that a bank manager named Faiz Siddaqui believes that whenever his phone rings, he feels closer to his religion. But Mufti Badru-Hasan declares that the very nature of a Koranic verse used as a ringtone means it must be cut short when the call is answered, and this is un-Islamic. Mohammed Asumin Qazmi, the head of the Dar-ul Uloom seminary, goes even further, and decrees that Koranic verses are not to be treated as disposable entertainment, and "anyone who persists in using these should be ostracised from society". If this rule is applied to all ringtones, Zygote will be tempted to convert.

DIM SUMS

It has taken four years and £11m to develop a website for UK

taxpayers to calculate the value of their retirement pensions. All the data already exists, of course, and is held on systems operated by the Inland Revenue and the Department for Work and Pensions, so it seemed like a good idea for people to check for themselves what they will be entitled to when they retire.

Then the Chancellor announced that the age of retirement was going to be raised because old people in Britain were refusing to die. An extra data field was needed for the website to calculate the correct pension prediction, namely, the statutory future retirement age as set out by the Chancellor. Now the Department for Work and Pensions has the brass neck to say it is impossible to deliver accurate predictions online, so the website has had to be scrapped.

Really? Zygote was able to work out a simple mathematical equation to handle the necessary calculation on the back of a fag packet, and is dumbfounded that an £11m system cannot do the same. No doubt we will be invited to phone a call centre in Mumbai to find out how much pension we'll be getting. At least they can do mental arithmetic over there.

PRINTER INK STINKER

The pages of computer magazines regularly overflow with reviews on all manner of products, except one: the ink cartridge. It is not enough

to know that the cost of printing a mono page ranges between 1.2p and 2.8p for most devices, and that colour costs around four times as much. The humble ink cartridge is the most frequently purchased computer-related item bar none and accounts for a hefty chunk of any computer shopper's budget.

It is the industry's worst-kept secret that printer manufacturers can afford to give away their machines for silly money, knowing that the rip-off prices they extort for ink cartridges will soon make up their profits. The proliferation of refill shops and online cartridge exchanges is evidence that this is big business, and growing all the time, so where are the reviews?

How well do the originals from the printer manufacturers compare with all the compatibles? Which printers have built-in chips that deny swapping a cheaper alternative for the vastly overpriced official brand cart? Furthermore, why don't those do-it-yourself dirty-squirty syringe thingies work?

BUNCH OF RANKERS

The Chinese are world-ranking entrepreneurs. Just over two years ago, a Chinese man decided to cash in on internet porn and established a network of online subscription services.

Chen Hui bamboozled the authorities by constantly changing domain names and servers, and he

managed to stash over £9m from 600,000 subscribers before he was tracked down and hauled before the Taiyuan Intermediate People's Court. He was not shot so his organs could be whipped out and flogged to the West for spare-part surgery, but was sentenced to life imprisonment. Perhaps the Court will fulfil its organ donor quota by tracking down all the other Chinese rankers who paid to download the porn.

DISPENSING JUSTICE

A Manchester court has sentenced 41-year-old Maxwell Parsons to 30 months in prison for using an MP3 player to hack cash dispensers. He was banged to rights by a fluke, after police stopped him for making an illegal u-turn and found a bank card in his car that didn't belong to him.

Parsons had fitted his MP3 player with a simple adaptor to attach it to the back of free-standing cash machines found in convenience stores and pubs, and used it to record telephone transmissions of digital data between the terminal and the bank. He exploited the data to clone customer cards and went on a £200,000 spending spree with his victims' credit.

The most worrying thing about this case is the vulnerability of free-standing cash machines. If the credit card slot on the front of a machine has been tampered with, chances are it can be spotted, but who among us takes a look round the back, and who would recognise an unauthorised dongle if we saw one? An alternative method of financial transactions will have to be sought if other rogues realise how easy it is to intercept and exploit credit card details. How about using numerically encoded tokens to exchange for goods received and services rendered? We could call it 'cash'. **ES**

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229: RINGTONES



There was a time when all ringtones sounded the same, no matter what network you were signed up to...



And there was a time when the most basic portable devices came with free audio alerts



But now, small subscribers can spend a fortune downloading idiotic ringtones.